

POLITICS AND POLICY

Shultz's Testiness Over Criticism From the Right May Inflict the Damage Opponents Have Sought

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WASHINGTON — When Secretary of State George Shultz met a top official of the conservative Heritage Foundation at a Christmas party last month, he offered a frosty season's greeting: "Oh, yes, you're the ones calling for my resignation," he snapped. "You also send me all those ridiculous letters" criticizing the State Department.

The incident, which left the Heritage Foundation's Phillip Truluck speechless, is but one example of how the constant criticism by conservatives is taking its toll on the usually unflappable George Shultz. The secretary of state has lashed out angrily recently at those with opposing views during private meetings with administration officials and members of Congress. And there have been some rare public displays of anger, such as when he threatened to resign over his disagreement with an administration proposal to subject top officials to lie-detector tests.

Hard-liners' complaints about Mr. Shultz include charges that he is undercutting aid to anti-communist "freedom fighters" in Angola, favors politically neutral foreign-service officers over Reaganites for top department jobs, and is too willing to negotiate with the Soviet Union.

But now, some analysts warn, Mr. Shultz, who usually ignores the familiar litany, is in danger of inflicting wounds on himself that hard-liners are unable to deliver. "Conservatives can do a lot of shouting (about Mr. Shultz), but they don't have any effective mechanism for doing anything about it," says David Smick, a Washington political consultant with ties to conservatives. "But it's getting to him; he's becoming very testy about it."

Indeed, some conservatives are beginning to believe that they have Mr. Shultz

on the ropes. "I think he'll be gone by springtime," says Howard Phillips, president of the Conservative Caucus. "He no longer has any strong political constituency within the Reagan coalition."

Ironically, these incidents come at a time when Mr. Shultz is firmly in control of foreign policy and, indeed, is espousing just the kind of hard line against terrorists that most conservatives would applaud. Senior White House officials say he enjoys President Reagan's full confidence. And he has a close, long-time friendship with Donald Regan, the powerful White House chief of staff.

Robert McFarlane, an experienced foreign-policy hand, has resigned and was succeeded as National Security Adviser by Admiral John Poindexter, a cautious career Navy officer who isn't likely to make waves. And Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger is busy defending the Pentagon's budget.

Mr. Shultz asserts, through an aide, that he isn't sensitive to the right-wing criticism and doesn't take it seriously. The aide adds that Mr. Shultz isn't making any special effort to improve relations with these groups because he doesn't believe they hinder his ability to do his job.

Nevertheless, Mr. Shultz, who has a reputation for being almost a deliberately dull speaker, has enlivened some recent meetings with caustic responses to those espousing right-wing causes.

In December, for instance, he tangled with Patrick Buchanan, the White House communications director, at a meeting with members of the National Security Council and the Economic Policy Council. Mr. Buchanan was pushing for administration support of a proposed bill that would give the president the authority to cut off commercial bank loans to Soviet-bloc nations. According to a participant at the meeting, Mr. Shultz turned angrily to Mr. Buchanan and accused him of "wanting to start an economic war against the Soviet Union."

And Mr. Shultz had a heated exchange in November with Rep. Jack Kemp during



George Shultz

a White House meeting with Republican congressional leaders. The New York Republican asked President Reagan why the administration opposed overt aid to Angolan insurgents. According to a congressional staff member, Mr. Shultz, who has led the opposition to overt aid, responded as though the question were a personal insult. In a loud voice, he reiterated his view that such aid would be counterproductive because it would reduce the chances of a negotiated settlement to the region's problems. (Mr. Shultz has indicated that he supports covert aid, however.)

Rebel Chief's Visit

A planned visit here later this month by Jonas Savimbi, the leader of the rebel group, could produce renewed attacks on Mr. Shultz by right-wingers, who have made Mr. Savimbi's cause the litmus test of loyalty to the Reagan doctrine of support for anti-communist insurgencies. Mr. Shultz is likely to meet with Mr. Savimbi, but that won't dilute hard-liners' suspicions about Mr. Shultz. "He isn't a Reaganaut; he seems to follow a State Department agenda, not a Reagan agenda," charges Rep. Robert Dornan (R., Calif.).

Meanwhile, a move in the Senate to create a select committee to investigate how the U.S. deals with political asylum could end up as an attempt to discredit Mr. Shultz. The idea, which has 60 sponsors, was spawned by the State Department's handling of the attempted defection of Miroslav Medvid, a Ukrainian sailor who was returned to his Soviet ship twice last October after jumping overboard. Conservatives charged that the U.S. agreed to return the sailor to avoid offending Moscow before the November summit meeting.

Despite the attacks by Rep. Dornan and other critics, however, Mr. Shultz continues to play a dominant role in the administration. He elbowed out the hard-liners and controlled the agenda at last November's summit meeting, and got the White House to back down from its lie-detector proposal.

But when Mr. Shultz, in a highly unusual public disagreement with the White House, threatened to resign last month over the lie-detector issue, it produced some wishful thinking. "His predecessor (Alexander Haig) tried that once too often, and then was shown the door," one conservative critic recalled.